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Coordination, programme and other questions

Identical letters dated 2 November 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Economic and Social Council

I have the honour to transmit the summary and conclusions of a recent seminar on the issue of cooperation and coordination between the principal United Nations organs (see annex).

The seminar, organized by the Netherlands in cooperation with the International Peace Academy, was held on 19 and 20 October 2001 in Tarrytown, New York. Participants in the seminar were United Nations Ambassadors representing Member States in the Security Council and/or the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 12, and of the Economic and Social Council, under agenda item 7.

(*Signed*) Dirk Jan **van den Berg**
Ambassador
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Annex to the identical letters dated 2 November 2001 from the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Economic and Social Council

The United Nations system in the new millennium: fostering substantive and operational linkages in the implementation of peace

Report on the high-level retreat, 19-20 October 2001, Tarrytown, United States of America

Summary, conclusions and next steps

Introduction

On 19 and 20 October 2001, the International Peace Academy hosted a high-level retreat in Tarrytown, New York, which brought together 30 Permanent and Deputy Permanent Representatives of the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and a few Member States as well as relevant high-level Secretariat representatives for a dinner on Friday evening and a full day meeting on Saturday, 20 October. The retreat was initiated and generously funded by the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The purpose of the retreat was to discuss the respective roles of the primary intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations and how these bodies could be better coordinated to increase the effectiveness of the United Nations in peace-building. Based on an initial concept paper by the International Peace Academy, the meeting occasioned a rich debate on the current state of coordination within the United Nations system, a diagnosis of the need for, but also of the obstacles to, improved coordination among the intergovernmental bodies and offered concrete proposals to improve their consultation and, possibly, coordination in the future.

Overview

Participants acknowledged the following key aspects of peace-building in the current context:

- The primarily intra-State nature of conflicts in the post-Cold War era has posed new and complex challenges. Violent conflicts, especially the intra-State conflicts that have characterized the past decade, necessitate long-term, multifaceted and multicomponent peace-building to create the conditions for sustainable and durable peace. This has contributed to a blurring of the distinction between the traditionally separate domains of peace and security, and economic, social and developmental matters.
- Cooperation to address the complex challenges of peace-building holistically has begun between and among field actors, and the United Nations Secretariat, funds, programmes and agencies. However, the potential of the primary

intergovernmental organs has been underutilized, despite the increasing convergence of their programmes of work.

- Failure to initiate consultation, and possibly coordination, among the intergovernmental bodies reflects negatively on United Nations membership and severely damages the seamlessness of operations attempting to create, maintain and build peace in war affected areas.

- While there can be no strict division of labour among the primary intergovernmental bodies, it has become urgent for Member States to address how they can work more closely together to contribute to the establishment of self-enforcing peace through integrated and multifaceted peace-building.

Participants further agreed on the following points:

- The question of how the intergovernmental bodies can work more closely together is not new. It has however become increasingly pressing, as peace-building has become and is likely to remain one of the primary challenges facing the United Nations membership in the near future, not least in Afghanistan.

- The main obstacle to increased consultation and, perhaps, coordination among the primary intergovernmental bodies is procedural, not substantive. Excessive rigidity characterizes the functioning of the bodies, which is compounded by political sensitivities regarding the appropriate role and membership of each. This militates against effective interaction among them.

- However, the tragic events of 11 September have resulted in a profound shift in attitude, creating willingness on the part of Member States to cooperate broadly on the maintenance of peace and security around the world. This unique window of opportunity to work together should be seized and carried forward in days and weeks to come by the intergovernmental bodies.

- The Security Council has, in practice, taken on the primary role in peace-building largely by default, not because it is necessarily best placed to do so. The Council could not and should not be the only intergovernmental body involved in peace-building. The Economic and Social Council in particular, but also the General Assembly, as well as the executive boards of the United Nations funds and agencies, have important roles to play. The most pressing question relates to the timing and nature of their respective roles and how these could be better integrated.

- Informal, case-by-case and ad hoc consultation and coordination among the intergovernmental bodies is likely to be most effective, at least in the initial stages of their increased interaction. To this end, several proposals were put forward by participants (see below: Solutions and next steps).

Diagnosis and summary of key points

Three key and interrelated themes emerged from the discussion and can be grouped broadly under the following headings: accountability, resources and results.

Accountability

- Because peace-building has emerged piecemeal, there has been no clear assignment of responsibility for it among the intergovernmental bodies. However, the spectrum of intergovernmental responsibility and accountability should be viewed as a continuum, beginning with mission planning and mandating and ending with self-sustaining peace in a given country/region. In this respect, it is of paramount importance that mandates are created with clear objectives and exit strategies.

- The distinction between peacekeeping and peace-building has become increasingly blurred, resulting in coordination challenges between and among at least three levels of actors within the United Nations system: those in the field; the Secretariat departments and agencies, funds and programmes; and the intergovernmental bodies. This is compounded by the host of non-United Nations actors that play an equally important peace-building role in the field, but whose work can undermine United Nations initiatives if their efforts are not jointly conceived and implemented. Improved coordination at and among each of these levels is crucial to the success of peace-building initiatives and requires integrated mission thinking in structures that match and are compatible with each other. The onus is also on the intergovernmental bodies to provide, with one voice, clear guidance and strategic focus with respect to the desired results of peace-building in a given context.

- The Secretary-General must enhance — and some suggested enforce — coordination from above. With regard to implementation, efforts have been made to improve coordination by placing greater responsibility for overall mission success on Special Representatives of the Secretary-General in particular, and strengthening the roles of Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators thereunder. Some participants suggested further empowering Special Representatives to direct the implementation of a mandate, likening such an enhanced role to that of a "tsar" or a "chef de cuisine".

- The identification of lead roles on a particular country, case or issue (be it in the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council or the General Assembly) was deemed vital to improving both accountability and results at Headquarters and, in particular, among Member States.

- At the intergovernmental level, some participants suggested that the Security Council could in practice take the lead in peace-building allowing relevant organs to play an equal role or in a way that matches their competencies. This would require greater interaction between the Council and other organs at the initial stage of peace operation planning such that the conditions for seamless hand-over to other organs better placed to implement certain peace-building activities are created from the start. However, it would also be predicated on greater effectiveness and accountability in the Council.

- Many participants also noted that peace-building requires system-wide coordination, and that the Economic and Social Council could have an important role to play in tandem with the Council and possibly the General Assembly. In particular, the competencies of the Council in relation to United Nations agencies, funds and programmes are of paramount importance for the effective implementation of certain peace-building tasks.

- Three major consultation and coordination gaps were noted, each of which contribute to poor accountability. The first is the difference which may exist in instructions sent respectively by Foreign Ministries on the one hand and treasuries and aid ministries on the other to their representatives on United Nations bodies (including agency executive boards) and the international financial institutions in Washington. The second is the lack of interaction between the executive boards and the Economic and Social Council on conflict related issues. The third is the long-standing yet still unsatisfactory practice of informal consultation between the Security Council and the troop-contributing countries.

Resources

- There will rarely be a perfect match between the requirements on the ground and the resources Member States are willing and able to provide; yet, this cannot be used as an excuse for inaction, failure or lack of realistic planning, especially contingency planning, for United Nations peace operations. Peace-building cannot be done on a shoestring and the Secretariat and Member States have a shared responsibility to ensure that minimum requirements are met to provide for mission success.

- In addition, it is a given that resources will often be allocated unevenly. This "hierarchy of attention", and the concomitant creation of "strategic favourites" and "orphans", is endemic to all intergovernmental bodies although it is perhaps particularly true of the work of the Security Council. Nonetheless, it is the role of all of the principal organs to focus on goals and how these can be achieved through strategic use of the available resources.

- Assessed versus voluntary contributions necessarily create distortions with regard to the interrelated tasks of peacekeeping and peace-building. In particular, components that are traditionally viewed as peacekeeping are financed by assessed contributions, while peace-building components, which are equally important and moreover may need to be implemented simultaneously, are financed, usually insufficiently, by voluntary contributions. This is especially true of demobilization, demilitarization and rehabilitation; in particular, the rehabilitation of former combatants is frequently under-funded, although it is crucial to avoid the recurrence of violent conflict.

Results

- The key performance indicator for peace-building is the difference that is made on the ground. In this respect, all efforts of the United Nations system should be focused on how each part can contribute to and support the national and local efforts to create sustainable peace in a given country or region.

- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) plays an important peace-building role in the field. However, its efforts may not always be optimally integrated with other United Nations peace-building initiatives. This can lead to both unintended and counter-productive developments at the local level. That being said, there was considerable support for UNDP's leadership on peace-building and for its frequently admirable performance in the field. There was also understanding for the difficulties it faces in discharging

multiple mandates. These issues are highly relevant to the executive board of UNDP.

- The Security Council has been able to produce tangible results in peace-building; but at the same time, it has become increasingly overworked. Moreover, it is not clear that the Council is best placed to address many of the economic, social and developmental needs of post-conflict societies, or that it has the capacity to remain involved over the long term. It may also not be desirable for it to do so, as more pressing potential and actual crises demand its attention.

- There has been a historical erosion of the authority of the Economic and Social Council. This has been compounded by its infrequently held meetings that focus on broad thematic questions and are accompanied by a relatively inflexible programme of work and by the perception that it is inoperational, too large to become more operational, and lacks the command and control required to produce results. The comparative advantages of the Council lie in its ability to bring together research and policy planning with operational activities and civil society participation; its special coordination role in relation to subsidiary machinery and specialized agencies of the United Nations system; its link to the broader United Nations system through the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC); its increasingly close relationship with the international financial institutions as part of the financing for development process; and its responsibility as the institutional base for coordination with respect to the executive boards of United Nations funds and programmes.

- Some examples of the Council's work from which lessons could be derived for its future role in peace-building are:

  (a) The Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti, which was created in 1999 at the invitation of the Security Council to contribute to the design of a long-term programme of support there;

  (b) UNAIDS, which was created by the Council and brings together seven funds, agencies and programmes in a specific programme activity with notable effectiveness;

  (c) And the ad hoc advisory group on countries emerging from conflict, which was created by the Council at the request of the General Assembly's Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on the Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa.

Solutions and next steps

- A unique opportunity exists for Member States to take responsibility for moving the issue of further consultation and coordination among the primary intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations system forward in the area of peace-building.

- Yet, some participants felt that in order to become more operational in the area of peace-building, both the Security Council, and especially the Economic and Social Council need to "do homework", examining past experience and identifying those areas in which each body could most usefully contribute to

peace-building, as a precondition for successful follow-through on the next steps suggested below.

Other, specific suggestions for moving the process forward informally, and in a manner that does not require altering the framework of the Charter of the United Nations, included:

- Nominating a member of the Council as the focal point for each mission and acting as the link to the general membership.
- Convening an informal meeting between the Presidents of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council as a preliminary step towards further informed consultation.
- Holding an open debate in the Council, or an informal meeting (the Arria formula), on particular country cases and inviting interested members to participate in the discussion.
- Devoting a high-level segment of the Council to peace-building.
- Increasing information sharing through simultaneous reporting to the Council and the Security Council and/or coordinating substantive support to the Council through the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
- Increasing the involvement of the Council and the General Assembly through the creation of groups of friends and/or smaller committees/task forces on a given country and possibly on issues relating to peace-building.
- Greater use and improvement of integrated mission task forces, including enhancing the interface of these with intergovernmental bodies and/or groupings of like minded States interested in a particular country/issue.
- Fostering further interaction between the intergovernmental organs, especially the Security Council, and the executive boards, especially with regard to the early stages of mission planning. In this respect, considering the Council in a "super-executive" role and facilitating this interaction.
- Enhancing the reaction capacities of the intergovernmental bodies, especially the Council and the General Assembly, e.g. facilitating their ability to convene meetings more quickly.

Other more general suggestions pertaining to fostering greater coordination included:

- Creating greater interaction between the intergovernmental bodies and regional organizations.
- Implementing those proposals that have been put forward in, for instance, the Secretary-General's report on the reform of the United Nations system (1997) and the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (2000) relating to improving coordination in the United Nations system.
- Improving the capacity of the United Nations system to assess past efforts and learn lessons from these, which might include more efficient evaluation and more frequent reporting by the Secretary-General and Security Council.